

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0237

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, CA
SUBJ: QUEBEC VOLTE-FACE ON PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS

REF: QUEBEC 0206

1. THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT WILL PARTICIPATE IN FEDERAL-
PROVINCIAL CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS IN OTTAWA NEXT SEPTEMBER, INTER-
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN HAS ANNOUNCED.
MORIN THUS LAID TO REST THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GOQ WOULD BOYCOTT
THE CONFERENCE, AS RENE LEVESQUE HAD THREATENED TO DO SEVERAL
WEEKS AGO (REFTEL), BECAUSE OF WHAT HE TERMED THE "PROFOUND
INSIGNIFICANCE" OF PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS.

2. QUEBEC HAS DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, MORIN SAID, FOR THREE
REASONS. THE PQ GOVERNMENT:
--HAD PROMISED AT ITS FIRST FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING IN
DECEMBER 1976 TO RESPECT THE "RULES OF THE GAME" AS LONG AS THE
PRESENT GOVERNMENT WAS IN POWER IN OTTAWA;
--INTENDED TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF QUEBECERS NO MATTER WHAT
HAPPENS, IN THE "AUTONOMIST TRADITIONS OF NUMEROUS PREVIOUS
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT";
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--DOES NOT WISH TO BLOCK, BY ITS ABSENCE, THE PROCESS OF
CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION FOR OTHER CANADIAN PROVINCES DESIRING CHANGE
WITHIN A FEDERALIST CONTEXT.

3. COMMENT: MORIN'S EXPLANATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S REASONS
FOR PARTICIPATING IN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES IS DISIN-
GENUOUS IN THE EXTREME. PRESUMABLY, PQ STRATEGISTS HAVE

COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT A BOYCOTT OF CONFERENCES ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IS LIKELY FURTHER TO UNDERCUT POPULAR BELIEF IN THE POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING FUTURE ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH THEIR CANADIAN PARTNERS. NO DOUBT, THEY HAVE ALSO COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SUCH A BELIEF IS CRUCIAL TO THEIR CHANCES OF BUILDING THE MAJORITY NECESSARY TO WIN A MEANINGFUL REFERENDUM. MOREOVER, THEY ALSO ARE AWARE OF THE POPULARITY, AS MEASURED IN RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, OF AN OPTION INVOLVING A MODIFIED FEDERATION. PQ MAY ATTEMPT TO UNDERCUT SUPPORT FOR THIS "RENEWED FEDERALISM" OPTION BY ATTEMPTING TO DEMONSTRATE THROUGH INTRANSIGENCE AT FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES THE DIFFICULTY IN INDUCING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO SATISFY QUEBEC'S ASPIRATIONS. THERE IS PLAINLY A CONTRADICTION IN THIS STRATEGY, AND THE PQ MAY ULTIMATELY FIND THAT IT HAS SIMPLY CONVINCED QUEBEC'S VOTERS THAT THE PQ IS THE WRONG GOVERNMENT TO NEGOTIATE ANY KIND OF CHANGE WITH OTTAWA.
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